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SUBJECT: THAILAND-DPRK RELATIONS: RTG SEES ITSELF AS  
CREDIBLE "MEDIATOR"

REF: A. STATE 97063

[B](#). BANGKOK 3590

[C](#). BANGKOK 3283

[D](#). BANGKOK 3128

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

1 (C) SUMMARY: In past and recent high-level meetings between senior U.S. and Royal Thai Government (RTG) officials, the Thais have noted their willingness to serve as a "mediator," or otherwise be helpful in international efforts to return North Korea (DPRK) to the Six-Party Talks. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart Sathirathai (when he was foreign minister) and Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon have all indicated their personal readiness to become involved in the issue. MFA interlocutors have indicated that several Thai initiatives are already underway. FM Kantathi will travel to Pyongyang July 8-12 to lay the ground work for a possible visit by Prime Minister Thaksin to meet with Kim Jong Il. While Thailand does have commercial interests in the DPRK, the Thai goal of playing some role in Korean peninsula diplomacy appears to be based primarily on PM Thaksin's ambitions that he and Thailand raise their leadership profile in the region, and on DPM Surakiart's aggressive, ongoing campaign to become the next UNSYG. END SUMMARY.

THAI PROPOSAL: "LET US SERVE AS MEDIATORS WITH THE DPRK"

[2](#). (C) During Deputy Secretary Zoellick's and PACOM Commander Admiral Fallon's visits to Bangkok in May, Foreign Minister Kantathi raised the possibility of Thailand playing a "mediating" role with the North Koreans "in order to get them re-engaged with the international community" (reftels C,D). During a May 31 meeting with Polcouns, MFA Deputy Director General for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Chakarin Chayabongse and Director of Korean Affairs Suprapon Petch-Vra (reftel B) made a direct offer for Thailand to serve as a mediator. Chakarin noted that Thailand is interested in contributing to stability in the region and intended to respond to North Korean overtures for closer ties in 2005, the 30th anniversary year of Thai-North Korean relations. "The anniversary gives Thailand an opportunity to play an important contribution, and move the Six-Party Talks forward from the standstill they are at now," said Chakarin.

RECENT THAI ENGAGEMENT WITH THE KOREANS

[3](#). (C) In outlining Thailand's suitability for some kind of role, MFA officials emphasize the RTG's "closeness" to the U.S. and China and what they regard as a "unique" level of trust between the RTG and the DPRK. North Korean officials apparently went to great lengths to pursue a bilateral meeting on the margins of the April 22-23 Asia-Africa Summit in Indonesia between PM Thaksin and Kim Yong Nam, President of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly Presidium. During that meeting Thaksin and Kim reportedly discussed the possibility of Thaksin visiting North Korea to meet with Kim Jong Il. (Note: Thaksin met Kim Jong Il in North Korea as a private businessman, before he became Thailand's PM. End Note.) The North Koreans reportedly told Thaksin in Jakarta that they consider him -- and Thailand -- to be trusted interlocutors. During his June 6 meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld (septel), Thaksin confirmed that he had offered to serve as a mediator and was prepared to meet personally with Kim Jong Il. Thaksin said Foreign Minister Kantathi would travel to North Korea July 8-12 to discuss this possibility with the North Koreans.

[4](#). (C) MFA officials told poloffs on May 31 that the RTG is in contact with the North Koreans at several levels and that recently there have been positive indications from the DPRK on their willingness to rejoin the Six-Party talks. (Comment: This could be wishful Thai thinking as the MFA officials were not very explicit about the exchanges and had no details to offer about the circumstances under which this might happen. End Comment.) The MFA officials said that the North Koreans had asked them to quietly approach other countries on their behalf to assure them that North Korea is not a threat.

[5](#). (C) Kim Hong-Kyun, Political Counselor of the ROK

Embassy in Bangkok, recently confirmed to poloffs that during Thaksin's May 24-27 visit to South Korea the PM also told President Roh that he was willing to play a mediating role between North Korea and the international community. Thaksin reportedly told Roh that he was prepared to personally meet with Kim Jong Il. Counselor Kim said the ROK understands that the purpose of FM Kantathi's July visit to North Korea is primarily to lay the ground work for such a Thaksin meeting.

16. (C) Kim reported that the ROK Embassy has frequent exchanges with the Thai MFA about the Thai offer to be a "mediator" with North Korea. Kim noted that Thailand enjoys good relations with both the DPRK and the ROK. He said the ROK welcomed the Thai offer to play a role as long as the clear message delivered to the DPRK is that North Korea should return to the Six-Party talks.

WHY ARE THE THAIS SO INTERESTED IN NORTH KOREA?

17. (C) The Thai interest in the Korean Peninsula is probably based on two primary factors: Thaksin's desire for a larger personal leadership role and a higher diplomatic profile for Thailand in the region; and Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart's overt campaign to become the next UNSYG. ROK Counselor Kim Hong-Kyun and Dr. Vitit Muntarbhorn (a respected academic and human rights activist, and currently the first UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the DPRK by the UN Human Rights Commission) both share this assessment. Vitit opined to poloffs that the RTG saw the potential publicity surrounding Thailand's involvement with North Korea as a possible huge boost to their international image, which would greatly bolster Surakiart's bid to become UN Secretary General.

18. (C) Vitit also noted what many other regional observers have been pointing out for some time: Thaksin is very serious in his drive to be recognized as a prominent leader in Asia. Thaksin understands that he has a window of opportunity now given the relatively weak leadership offered by Thailand's neighbors and other ASEAN countries, and wants to firmly establish Thailand and himself as Southeast Asia's undisputed leader, and a force in Asia writ large.

19. (C) Besides the personal ambitions of Thaksin and Surakiart, commercial factors probably should be considered when analyzing the recent Thai interest in North Korea. But the Thai try to minimize that factor. During poloffs' meeting with MFA DDG Chakarin, he said that Pyongyang is overdue in paying the RTG 150 million dollars for past rice sales, and that the pursuit of close ties with the DPRK was a matter of establishing "trust not trade." Nevertheless, the main thrust of Thaksin's overall foreign policy as "CEO Prime Minister" is an expansion of trade and commercial opportunities, and the Thai may see long-term potential in North Korea for their telecom and agricultural sectors.

BOYCE